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EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE UNITED NATIONS HIGH COMMISSIONER FOR REFUGEES

Fifty-first session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 547th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 4 October 2000, at 10 a.m.

Chairman: Mr. KHORRAM (Islamic Republic of Iran)

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The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

ANNUAL THEME: UNHCR@50: FROM RESPONSE TO SOLUTIONS (agenda item 4) (continued) (A/AC.96/938)

1. Mr. MABALA (Observer for Gabon) said that the relationship between UNHCR and Gabon had been one of long and fruitful cooperation. Gabon's hospitality was legendary and, in Africa, it was recognized to be a country of asylum. In its desire to fulfil its international obligations and solve the problem of refugees and asylum-seekers, Gabon had developed a legal framework - the 1998 Refugees (Status in the Gabonese Republic) Act and three decrees implementing it - enabling it to coordinate its work with UNHCR better. As a haven of peace in a troubled region, Gabon had become a magnet for asylum-seekers: the number of registered refugees currently stood at 17,500, or 14.58 per cent of the country's population; however, the Government believed that was certainly an underestimate, since many refugees lodged with nationals and others had voluntarily chosen to remain clandestine. Joint action with UNHCR in order to obtain more precise figures would be useful.

2. With regard to the relationship between respect for the right to asylum and immigration policies, the question was how to reconcile the right to asylum with the control of migration flows. With UNHCR's support and help, Gabon had decided to study the room for manoeuvre that should be available to member States. A major seminar to raise public awareness of the issue was currently being held in Libreville, with technical support from UNHCR.

3. Everyone realized that the situation of refugees and displaced persons demanded greater international solidarity in order to achieve better results and appropriate solutions. Gabon was grateful to all those friendly countries and NGOs that were providing assistance. In cases where refugee flows were the result of armed conflicts, Gabon believed that no durable or satisfactory solution was possible without the total elimination of the root causes of the conflicts. Dialogue was the best way to settle such conflicts. Gabon had consistently held to the ideal of peace in its foreign policy and diplomacy.

4. Mr. BOUPHA (Observer for the Lao People's Democratic Republic) said that, despite the results obtained during the past year, when many States had accepted their humanitarian obligations and worked with UNHCR to help find a solution to the refugee problem, it was still a long way from response to solution, in the words of the theme of the current session of the Executive Committee. Some 22 million refugees around the world were of concern to UNHCR, as well as other displaced persons, who needed protection and assistance and who were, for the most part, innocent victims. It was necessary to carry out a concrete analysis of all the complex aspects of the issue.

5. The Lao Government had implemented its humanitarian policy with very limited resources, but a firm political will and a great deal of determination. Under the procedures and plan of action adopted at meetings between Thailand, UNHCR and the Lao People's Democratic Republic, more than 28,000 people had returned from Thailand and more than 4,000 from other countries (China, Germany, Japan, the United States) and several thousand displaced persons had returned home by their own means. In order to ensure the successful settlement of the numbers

expected, it was essential to prepare sites that would later provide a durable economic and social infrastructure. That was a formidable task and would require external aid, particularly from UNHCR, as agreed at the latest tripartite meeting in Vientiane.

6. Mr. NKURUNZIZA (Observer for Burundi), deploring the tragic deaths of the members of the United Nations humanitarian community, said he believed that it was the international community's duty to prosecute their killers as war criminals.

7. The unfortunate events in Burundi had triggered massive displacements of people both within the country and to other countries. There were around 550,000 Burundian refugees, almost all of them in Tanzania, and nearly the same number of displaced persons within Burundi. Those figures did not include groups which had been in the recently dismantled protected facilities. Thanks to the recently signed Arusha Peace Accord, Burundi should now be able to move into an era of peace and true political stability, the key to all sustainable human development.

8. If the rebel group signed a ceasefire agreement, as the region's heads of State had demanded, Burundian refugees would return en masse. In order to receive them, the Burundian Government was developing a global operational plan for 2001-2002 in conjunction with the United Nations system. The main concern was to facilitate the reception, resettlement and reintegration of the returnees.

9. The majority of the affected population, whether returnees or displaced persons, were women and children. They were in desperate need of help and care in all respects. Burundi urged the High Commissioner to give them special attention and welcomed the initiative of the Canadian Government and UNICEF, which had organized an international conference on children affected by war, which Burundi had attended, in Winnipeg.

10. Burundi would spare no effort to enable its refugee sons and daughters, wherever they were, to return to their country and help build a new society. It requested all the countries of the subregion, as well as OAU and the United Nations, which had signed the Peace Accord, to do everything in their power to ensure that the rebels signed a ceasefire agreement.

11. Mr. BANGURA (Observer for Sierra Leone) expressed gratitude to UNHCR for its work and constant sacrifices since the outbreak of the conflict in Sierra Leone in March 1991.

12. Despite the violation of the Lomé Peace Agreement by the Revolutionary United Front in May 2000, the Government of Sierra Leone still had hope and confidence in the Agreement. Nevertheless, it was concerned about the risk that the conflict might escalate in neighbouring Guinea and Liberia. If that in fact occurred, a humanitarian crisis could be triggered throughout the subregion. Sierra Leone, which was already overstretched with the problem of providing emergency assistance to its own returning refugees and displaced persons, as well as their resettlement and reintegration, was worried that that burden might increase further if refugees from Liberia and Guinea found themselves seeking a safe haven in Sierra Leone. It therefore appealed to UNHCR and the wider international community to forestall any aggravation of the conflict in Liberia and Guinea and help restore peace and security to the West Africa subregion.

13. It was also essential to reinforce the complementarity between emergency humanitarian assistance and long-term development programmes in Sierra Leone; without such programmes, the current attempts to repatriate refugees would fail. Although displaced persons did not fall within UNHCR's mandate, Sierra Leone asked UNHCR to bear in mind the fact that there were 1.3 million internally displaced persons in Sierra Leone and they required the same assistance as refugees to facilitate their resettlement and reintegration. The nine years of rebel warfare had completely destroyed the country's economy. Help was needed to foster economic recovery through community-based projects; that could not be done without assistance, at least in the immediate future.

14. A national commission had been set up to coordinate plans and operations for repatriating and reintegrating Sierra Leonean refugees. Strengthening the commission's capacity would go a long way towards achieving the common humanitarian and peace building role in the West Africa subregion.

15. Mr. WRENCH (United Kingdom) associated himself with the statement made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union. The United Kingdom paid tribute to UNHCR for all it had achieved in the past half century and wished to express its sorrow and anger at the recent deaths of four UNHCR staff members, killed while performing their humanitarian duties.

16. The fiftieth anniversary of UNHCR was a time to take stock of how the world had changed, look at what the international community had done, reaffirm the principles that had guided its actions and, most importantly, consider how those principles could be best put into practice. The United Kingdom therefore welcomed the global consultations launched by UNHCR and the independent evaluation of its work in Kosovo.

17. The aims established in 1950 remained as vital today: every effort must be made to protect refugees and help them find a more secure future. However, major changes had occurred in the past 50 years, as the paper on the annual theme recognized. The United Kingdom hoped that the global consultations would help to provide practical responses to the challenges that had been created: how to establish a protection regime that quickly identified and supported those in need yet was robust enough to deter those who sought to misuse it. The United Kingdom, in common with all European Union member States, had recently restated its commitment to the right of asylum. But if more was to be done to help those in genuine need of refuge, it was necessary to look at the asylum question as a whole. At present, many countries, including the United Kingdom, spent too much time and money dealing with asylum applications that had no merit and combating the activities of traffickers. That imbalance must be removed. The questions that arose were not easy ones, but they were important, and everyone stood to gain by finding the right answers.

18. Mr. REGONESSA (Observer for the Central African Republic) said that the issues of migration and refugees had undoubtedly put their stamp on the start of the new millennium and the responsibility of the international community and States, together with UNHCR's role, were now central to the debate concerning the response to be given to so many demands. Following its legendary policy of hospitality within the subregion, the Central African Republic continued to receive refugees and it paid tribute to the donors whose assistance, coordinated by UNHCR,

made that possible. Everyone had a duty to find an early solution to the refugee problem, in view of the tragic fate suffered by women and children in makeshift, uncomfortable and dangerous camps.

19. There was no longer any doubt about the close connection between conflicts and forced population displacements and Governments were now more aware of the need to resolve them rapidly, not only in Africa, but elsewhere too. It was not possible to solve the refugee problem without putting an end to the conflicts that forced people to flee and the conflicts themselves would not be solved unless basic power sharing issues were correctly addressed. In some regions of Africa, the chief concern seemed to be the management of natural resources such as oil, diamonds or timber, at the expense of the well-being of the population. It was now generally recognized that there was no effective mechanism for resolving the conflicts in Africa and, more importantly, that some parties to those conflicts were openly supported by particular Governments. What was needed, in Africa as elsewhere, was a reconstruction programme. The situation of the sub-Saharan States, including the Central African Republic, was desperate, in both security and economic terms, and donors should bear that in mind when they allocated development aid to those countries.

20. Mr. SIMKHADA (Observer for Nepal) associated himself with the delegations that had condemned the barbarous acts committed against UNHCR staff members.

21. The choice of the annual theme, "UNHCR@50: from response to solutions" was highly pertinent, and the paper dealing with it provided an excellent background to the Executive Committee's reflection and deliberation.

22. Over the past 50 years, there had been a phenomenal increase in the world's refugee population. Conflicts within and between States, ethnic strife, territorial disputes, external intervention, inter alia, had caused large refugee outflows that had seriously affected the political, cultural and socio-economic structure of the affected countries. UNHCR's task had been further complicated by the need to provide rapid responses in conflict situations as well as durable solutions to the long-standing problems of refugees in camps, the need to provide assistance in the midst of armed conflict and the growth in the number of international actors responding to humanitarian crises. UNHCR's biggest challenge was to maintain its commitment to the principles of asylum, refugee protection and voluntary repatriation, yet the decline in resources was jeopardizing its ability to deal with crisis situations. It was the responsibility of the international community to continue to support host countries, especially the developing and least developed countries, in the care and maintenance of refugees. Nepal had appreciated the High Commissioner's visit in early May, which had included a visit to the Bhutanese refugee camps in eastern Nepal. Nepal had granted asylum to more than 100,000 refugees from Bhutan during the past 10 years - a heavy burden for his country - and the High Commissioner's visit had been an important event for them. The only question that remained was what the international community was prepared to do to help solve their problems.

23. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, with knowledge and know-how at an unprecedented level, some human beings were still forced to lead a life of indignity as refugees, away from the safety of their homes, in camps that were often in foreign lands. Someone had once wondered about man's inhumanity to man. Someone else had suggested that reconciling

the contradictions created by an increasingly geocentric economy with increasingly ethnocentric politics would be the biggest challenge facing the world in the twenty-first century. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Rwanda and Burundi and Kosovo were all stark reminders of that. In an increasingly interdependent world, the values of tolerance, coexistence and pluralism were essential.

24. Mr. POE (Observer for Liberia) said that he deeply deplored the deaths of four UNHCR staff members in West Timor and Guinea. However, he was pleased to be able to say that, consistent with its desire to protect humanitarian workers, the Liberian Government had contributed to the release of Ms. Djeya, a UNHCR staff member who had been kidnapped during a mission to Guinea in September 2000, and to the release earlier in the year of more than 500 United Nations soldiers held hostage in Sierra Leone. Liberia and UNHCR collaborated closely, as illustrated by the appeal the Government had recently made to UNHCR for the return of Liberian nationals who wished to leave Guinea. The Government of Guinea was currently considering a request that it should authorize the evacuation of Liberian nationals who wished to return to their country, but it had not yet given an answer. At that very moment, Lofa in the north of Liberia was being attacked by dissidents from Guinea for the third time in two years, a situation that seriously impeded both UNHCR operations in Liberia and the repatriation efforts. Against that background, the Governments of Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone had established the Mano River Union Security Council to discuss issues of security common to the three States and had requested the United Nations Security Council to deploy observers to monitor Liberia's borders with Guinea and Sierra Leone. The Government of Liberia was anxious to find a durable solution to what was a worrying situation and asked UNHCR to extend its repatriation programme for Liberians by 12 months, mobilize resources for continuous and increased support for UNHCR operations in Liberia and, in view of the mistrust that blighted the Mano River Union security arrangements, provide material and financial support for the implementation of a new Mano River Union Security Council. For its own part, it would ensure that UNHCR's operations in Liberia could continue unhindered.

25. Mr. CHIKUNI (Observer for Malawi) expressed his delegation's gratitude at once again being invited to attend the meeting of the UNHCR Executive Committee, a body that would unfortunately retain its importance as long as armed conflicts, lack of good governance and human rights violations continued to produce refugee situations throughout the world. Malawi had the greatest respect for humanitarian workers - and therefore condemned attacks on them in the strongest terms - and for United Nations peace initiatives as a whole. Malawi, which had ratified the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and the OAU Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa assured UNHCR that it would cooperate fully in the area of refugee protection. It was currently pursuing the removal of reservations included in its own 1989 Refugee Act in order to guarantee the same rights and opportunities to refugees and other foreign nationals living in the country.

26. Ms. AL HAJJAJI (Observer for the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya) said she was proud that her country, which enjoyed a special relationship with the major African powers, had been responsible for a number of crisis-resolution mediation processes, including in the Horn of Africa and the Great Lakes region, and that it had been among the first to provide assistance to the victims of those crises. Humanitarian workers on the ground could attest to the fact that they had always worked side by side with Libyan NGOs to help their African brothers. Moreover,

African refugees in Libya not only benefited from a sound infrastructure, but also enjoyed the same rights as Libyan nationals themselves. The Libyan Government was conscious of its humanitarian duty and was therefore currently preparing a memorandum of understanding with UNHCR. Libyan civil society was also becoming increasingly aware in that regard, as illustrated by the large number of NGOs that had recently been formed and the many cooperation initiatives with international humanitarian organizations. She was shocked at the serious incidents that were taking place in the holy city of Jerusalem and the occupied Palestinian territories, including deliberate murders, massacres and gross violations of human rights, as well as assaults on the holy places and shots being fired at the faithful by the Israeli occupying authorities, all of which had entailed in the past and would continue to entail an increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons. In view of such incidents, the United Nations and its agencies and specialized institutions must take a firm stand and clearly condemn what was a violation of international legitimacy, international humanitarian law, human rights law and the four 1949 Geneva Conventions.

27. Mr. MUKULAY (Democratic Republic of the Congo) expressed his personal thanks to the High Commissioner, whose numerous visits to his country revealed her awareness of its problems. The Democratic Republic of the Congo was indeed in a very difficult situation. Many of its nationals had taken refuge in neighbouring countries following the unwarranted aggression the country had been subjected to, in flagrant violation of international law, and a fresh wave of emigration had started some weeks previously, involving 100,000 people who were now living in very difficult conditions in the neighbouring Republic of Congo, where they urgently required assistance from UNHCR and friendly countries. Yet, despite that exodus, the Democratic Republic of the Congo was host to more than 300,000 foreign nationals. It was a huge country, surrounded by nine neighbours, and lay at the meeting-point of central, eastern and southern Africa. If it was to play its humanitarian role fully in such a complex environment, UNHCR's Kinshasa office should become a regional bureau. It was also necessary to work on conflict prevention. Humanitarian work was impossible without a political solution. He expected established democracies to set an example in that area.

28. Mr. VAHABZADA (Observer for Azerbaijan) paid tribute to Mrs. Ogata, who had become an icon of the United Nations and with whom he had had the great honour to work; he thanked her for supporting his Government's work on behalf of refugees and displaced persons. He was, however, surprised that the UNHCR document on the annual theme made no mention of the situation in Azerbaijan, despite the fact that the country held the sorry world record for the largest displaced population, since nearly one in eight of its inhabitants was a displaced person or a refugee. He deplored the fact that, even when conflicts persisted, the international community's attention waned and the result was a decline in amounts of aid that was extremely detrimental to the victims of forced displacements. An international conference held in Baku in May 2000, in which the President of Azerbaijan and representatives of many international organizations had taken part, had concluded that displaced persons and refugees required as much aid as in the past and that they would continue to require such aid until they had been resettled in their permanent place of residence. He denounced the cooperation agreement signed on 5 September 2000 between the puppet regime in the occupied Azerbaijani region of Nagorno-Karabakh and the Armenian Government, which made it impossible for Azerbaijani displaced persons to return home and, by allowing an increase of 300,000 over 10 years in the population of the region, destroyed any prospect of a peaceful settlement of the armed conflict.

The responsibility was entirely that of the Armenian Government, which had not complied with its obligations under article 49 of the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which prohibited the deportation or transfer by an Occupying Power of parts of its own civilian population into the territory it occupied. Such actions were also defined as war crimes under article 8 of the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court. On behalf of the Azerbaijani Government, he appealed to the Executive Committee to take all necessary measures in accordance with its mandate in order to forestall any actions preventing refugees and displaced persons from exercising their inalienable right to return.

29. Mr. BIABAROH-IBORO (Observer for the Republic of the Congo) said that the question of the security of humanitarian workers had come to the forefront once again; he deplored the fact that UNHCR's budget could not cope with the demands of protection and humanitarian assistance. He appealed for generosity from donors for nationals of his own country who were refugees abroad and for foreign refugee groups within his country. Tens of thousands of people fleeing the fighting in the Democratic Republic of the Congo were now seeking refuge in the Republic of the Congo and his Government was grappling with the problems of reconstruction and was unable to provide more than limited assistance and protection; there was a desperate need for international aid.

30. Ms. KASINGO (Namibia) said that, although UNHCR had been in existence for 50 years, the world - and particularly Africa - was still afflicted by conflicts that created an intolerable burden of refugees and displaced persons. Since 1999, as a result of fighting in Angola, Namibia had been obliged to take in nearly 14,000 refugees. It had been very fortunate to receive relief from the United States, Switzerland, the Danish and Finnish Red Cross societies and other agencies in its efforts to help those in distress. In the face of such a situation, it was clearly necessary to consider, at the regional, continental and international levels, a global approach to conflict resolution and prevention. She reaffirmed her Government's commitment to the cause of refugees. Namibia even took in a certain number of refugees from countries other than neighbouring ones, who were attracted by its political stability and the fact that they were treated in accordance with the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol and the guidelines contained in the 1969 OAU Convention; that treatment had been further improved in 1999 with the adoption of the Refugee Recognition Act.

31. U ZAW TUN (Observer for Myanmar), referring to the question of Myanmar nationals residing in Thailand, said that a clear distinction should be made between those who had left their country for purely economic reasons and members and sympathizers of the Karen National Union (KNU) and their families, who had had quite different reasons for leaving the country. The first group were economic refugees who had been tolerated by Thailand, but were now trying to return to Myanmar. However, under current legislation, the Government was obliged to refuse to allow them to do so. On the other hand, it authorized the return of KNU ex-combatants who agreed to lay down their arms and even provided assistance to enable them to reintegrate into civilian life. So-called students receiving external support were also in that category. Every State was free to legislate as it wished on the question of economic immigration and that international activities to help refugees and displaced persons should respect the sovereignty of States. It was up to Myanmar and Thailand to resolve the problems arising in that connection jointly, in a spirit of cooperation and mutual understanding.

32. Mr. PETÖCZ (Observer for Slovakia), thanking Mrs. Ogata for all the years she had dedicated to extremely complex humanitarian tasks, said that he supported the recommendations she and the United Nations Secretary-General had made in their opening statements to the effect that UNHCR should make the security of humanitarian staff its highest priority.

33. The number of migrants into European Union countries, including Central European countries, was growing and both the 1985 Schengen accords and the 1990 Dublin Convention should be an encouragement to the affected States to strengthen their cooperation in that area in political, economic and legal terms. For its part, Slovakia had for several years been making efforts to solve the problems associated with granting the right of asylum in its territory and to provide assistance to refugees, for example, by granting temporary protection to 2,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina during the 1990s and promulgating the Refugee Act in 1996 - later amended - which included all the principles of the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Thanks to UNHCR support in those various areas, Slovakia could now boast of having reached the level of Europe's developed democratic States in the matter of refugee protection.

34. Mr. AL-DOURI (Observer for Iraq) congratulated Mrs. Ogata on her inestimable work in the humanitarian field and drew attention to the wholly tragic effects of the cruel embargo which had been imposed by the United States and the United Kingdom since August 1990 and had triggered large population flows. According to figures provided by UNHCR, there were now 130,000 refugees in Iraq. UNHCR was working in many of the camps in the country, but its budget for Iraq was very limited and, in any case, proportionately far lower than its budget for another Middle Eastern country. Moreover, in defiance of the logic that prevailed everywhere else, refugees in Iraq were often better off than Iraq's own nationals, for they received UNHCR assistance in addition to their regular ration card. Iraq therefore urged UNHCR to denounce the embargo, which was resulting in mass population displacements.

35. He strongly condemned the repression and cruel war being waged on the Palestinian people, which had already claimed many victims, including women, children and elderly people. He hoped that the Executive Committee would condemn the organized violence being directed against the Palestinian people at the instigation of Zionist groups.

36. Mr. WOLDEGIORGIS (Observer for Eritrea) praised Mrs. Ogata's devotion to the cause of refugees and expressed his delegation's deep sorrow at the crimes recently committed against UNHCR staff. UNHCR had made pleasing progress and now seemed to be addressing long-term development beyond emergency humanitarian aid and making efforts to find comprehensive, durable solutions to the refugee problem. Nevertheless, that aim could be achieved only if adequate structures were put in place to strengthen coordination among the various parties and to promote peace and security at the national and international levels. In addition, care should be taken not to exclude whole categories from emergency relief operations and development assistance. Assistance should be provided to internally displaced persons as well as to refugees and to host countries as well as to countries of return and countries experiencing significant population displacement. All those countries played an important humanitarian role, frequently at the expense of their economic and social health.

37. Despite its troubled past, Eritrea was once again the setting for a serious humanitarian crisis that had prompted more than 1 million of its inhabitants to leave their homes and head

either for other areas of the country or for other States; that had represented a setback to the voluntary repatriation plan that was to have allowed Eritrean refugees who had been in Sudan since the war of independence to return home. Despite the difficulties, the Government had don its best to improve the situation of Eritrean nationals and many of the refugees or displaced persons had spontaneously returned home after the cessation of hostilities. The problem of long-term refugees was still receiving attention and should at long last be resolved with UNHCR's help and that of Sudan, which was working closely with Eritrea on the issue through its Commission for Refugees. The situation in Eritrea remained desperate, however, and he called on the international community to provide generous emergency assistance to his country and to allocate funds to UNHCR to enable it to fulfil its mandate.

38. Ms. NASCIMBENE DE DUMOND (Argentina) associated herself with the tributes already paid to Mrs. Ogata for her work in UNHCR and strongly condemned the murder of UNHCR staff members working in West Timor and Guinea. The security of United Nations staff members and humanitarian workers was of the greatest concern to Argentina, which, on assuming the Presidency of the United Nations Security Council in February 2000, had taken th opportunity to initiate a debate on the issue in the Council and had spoken on the subject at the Millennium Summit. In view of the increasing risks, she welcomed the fact that the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court provided that acts of violence against humanitarian workers should be considered war crimes and called for concrete measures, including legislative measures, to be taken to ensure the security of those involved.

39. Recalling that the notion of the right to asylum had already been defined in several Latin American regional instruments that predated the 1951 Convention, she said that Argentina which had a long tradition of hosting refugees, had decided to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Convention with a number of public events. She also welcomed the MERCOSUR initiative on the harmonization of the region's legislation on international protection and supported UNHCR's proposal to organize global consultations on that subject.

40. Mr. AMAT FORÉS (Observer for Cuba) expressed his gratitude to Mrs. Ogata, who had never faltered in her efforts or betrayed her principles in acting to meet the enormous challenges regarding refugees, despite the lack of material and financial resources. Since the High Commissioner's visit to Cuba in May 2000, the links between Cuba and UNHCR had become closer. Nevertheless, UNHCR should raise the level of assistance for the many refugees from Africa and Latin America living in Cuba, since the Government was finding it difficult to shoulder the burden alone as a result of the economic difficulties the country was facing owing to the embargo.

41. He also pointed out that it was the poor southern countries that were most affected by th refugee problem. The situation reflected the inequities of the international order and could be put right only by bilateral and multilateral action leading to concrete commitments. It was also necessary to preserve the purely humanitarian, apolitical nature of UNHCR and strictly apply th principles established in its Statute, the relevant General Assembly resolutions, the 1951 Convention and the 1967 Protocol, particularly in view of the blurring of the distinctio between economic migrants and refugees. Similarly, it was essential to abide strictly by the

principles currently applied on assistance to internally displaced persons, which should be granted only at the request of the United Nations Secretary-General or the competent bodies and on condition that the State in question gave its consent.

42. Ms. PARPAROVA (Observer for Bulgaria) endorsed the statement made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union. She recalled that, when the south-east European refugee crisis had broken out, Bulgaria, as country of first asylum, had granted temporary humanitarian protection to all asylum-seekers arriving in the country. The Bulgarian Government had even gone so far as to take responsibility for a refugee camp located in Macedonia, in the knowledge that the stability of the Balkans, the future of the Dayton Accords and the creation of a multi-ethnic society in Kosovo depended on solving the refugee problem. In that regard, Bulgaria was grateful to UNHCR and the European Union for having helped it carry out its plan to improve refugee reception procedures. With UNHCR help, the Bulgarian Police Academy had set up the region's first refugee rights training centre, which had already been attended by 1,000 police officers. Lastly, she reported the entry into force in 1999 of Bulgaria's Refugee Act, which incorporated the highest standards of European legislation on refugee protection.

43. Mr. CHOLPONKUL (Observer for Kyrgyzstan) said that the current session was of enormous importance for Kyrgyzstan, coinciding as it did with the fiftieth anniversary of UNHCR, an organization that had done so much to help create the international refugee protection system. For its part, the Kyrgyz Government had continued with its work on behalf of refugees and other categories of migrants: decrees setting out the national policy on migration procedures had been issued and draft legislation on refugees was soon to be considered - all of which would make it possible to establish a legal framework for refugee protection. In that regard, the Government counted on the aid and support of UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (OIM).

44. Despite its economic difficulties, Kyrgyzstan continued to seek sustainable solutions to the problem of Tajik refugees. The two countries already had a draft agreement on a simplified naturalization procedure. On the question of security, he said religious extremist groups, which were growing more numerous as the war in Afghanistan intensified, were making forays into Kyrgyzstan. The Government was grateful to UNHCR for helping it set up border controls, but would like it to become more involved in the area of prevention. He welcomed the decision to follow up the CIS conference and requested UNHCR to facilitate that process. Kyrgyzstan believed that a regional approach should be taken to solving problems common to all the Central Asian countries. Lastly, he said that Kyrgyzstan remained willing to take in, integrate and protect refugees, but that it was dependent on the support the international community was prepared to give it.

45. Mr. BETANCOURT RUALES (Observer for Ecuador) said that the time had come to reflect on UNHCR's activities and the challenges that awaited it in the next millennium. Looking back, there was little doubt that UNHCR had adequately fulfilled its mandate to provide international protection for refugees and seek lasting solutions to their problems. With regard to the challenges, UNHCR should continue to cooperate with other humanitarian organizations with the same vocation to implement strategies making it possible to provide immediate assistance to all those who needed protection. The establishment of a partnership of that kind

would enable UNHCR to improve its operational effectiveness and to ensure the security of its own staff, who worked in truly dangerous conditions. With regard to international solidarity, aid should be provided to the developing countries, which were the most affected by refugee crises. Lastly, he expressed his gratitude to UNHCR for having helped his country provide humanitarian assistance to displaced persons near the northern border of Ecuador.

46. Ms. NEGRU (Observer for the Republic of Moldova) said that the recent murders of UNHCR staff members had caused great distress in her country, but should not cast a shadow over the current session, which was of great importance because it coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of UNHCR. UNHCR and Moldova, which had begun to work together in 1995, had been cooperating more closely since 1997, when the UNHCR office had opened in Chisinau. The office had conducted several awareness-raising activities, gradually assuaging the doubt and reluctance of the Moldovan Government, until the possibility of the Republic of Moldova acceding to the 1951 Convention was now no longer as remote as it had been five years before. The various activities carried out by UNHCR in the Republic of Moldova were now bearing fruit: draft legislation on refugees had just been prepared and should be enacted during the current session of Parliament. The Government also intended to set up a national authority to deal with refugees' problems, but its financial difficulties obliged it to seek help from UNHCR and the international community in order to complete the project.

47. Meanwhile, pending the establishment of a regulatory framework, the Moldovan Government, which respected the principle of non-refoulement, was actively seeking solutions to the problems of asylum-seekers and refugees in its territory. The Ministry of the Interior had established a centralized refugee registration system and was preparing to introduce special identity cards for asylum-seekers. Unfortunately, a number of problems were beyond its control, including the consequences of the 1992 armed conflict. The unconstitutional self-proclaimed Republic of Transdniestria was still the main obstacle preventing the settlement of the problem of illegal migration and the main reason for the Moldovan Government's reluctance to accede to the 1951 Convention was the permeability of the country's eastern border. The Government was grateful for UNHCR's aid for displaced persons, but considered that only the strict implementation of the decisions of the OSCE summit in Istanbul on the withdrawal of Russian troops and armaments from the east of the country would really help to stem the flows of illegal migrants towards that region. It was also necessary to give some thought to the frozen Transdniestria conflict and ensure observance of the international standards applicable to displaced persons. Lastly, she hoped that the Executive Committee would take her statement into account when adopting the UNHCR programme budget for 2001.

48. Mr. KRISAFI (Observer for Albania) said that he wished to highlight the work done by UNHCR during the great humanitarian crisis in Kosovo, when some 1 million Albanians had been forced to leave their homes. That crisis had been a valuable experience, insofar as it had shown how UNHCR should cooperate with other organizations, donor Governments and other humanitarian actors in emergency situations. At present, cooperation and coordination efforts in the humanitarian field and in terms of reconstruction were continuing under the umbrella of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. Cooperation between UNHCR and the Albanian authorities focused on the implementation of quick impact projects aimed at rehabilitating infrastructure and building local capacity. In close cooperation with the Albanian Government, IOM, OSCE and the Council of Europe, UNHCR was also helping to tackle the problem of

transit through Albania by asylum-seekers, refugees, victims of human trafficking, etc. Another area of cooperation was the upgrading of relevant legislation, in particular asylum law. His Government was ready to support UNHCR in facing the coming challenges.

49. Mr. GUILLEN (Observer for Peru) said that his first thought with regard to the theme of the session had been that UNHCR's mandate had broadened since its foundation as a result of the many crises which it had faced and which had taken new and more complex forms in a globalizing world. Today more than ever, only by strict respect for the international legal order was it possible to combat arbitrary and selfish action. At the same time, the close interdependence that resulted from globalization required all members of the international community to join forces and share their resources in order to solve problems that had become international in scope. His delegation therefore welcomed the call by UNHCR for special consultations to be organized to promote the full implementation of the 1951 Convention. It wholeheartedly supported that initiative and was ready to make a constructive contribution to the dialogue.

50. He agreed with UNHCR that, if refugee problems were to be solved, humanitarian aid must be linked to sustainable development. Development aid was essential in tackling the root causes of refugees' flight from their countries. Preventive measures were needed, the most important of them relating to the promotion, protection and effective enjoyment of human rights. At the same time, it must not be forgotten that the crises that triggered mass population exoduses broke out basically in poor countries, which were the very ones that also had to take in ever-growing numbers of refugees. It was therefore important to help them eliminate the causes of those crises and regain their political and social stability.

51. Mr. MADI (Observer for Jordan) said that refugees' problems could be resolved only by addressing their root causes, through action on many fronts to respond to refugees' basic needs, assist them to return home and prevent the outbreak of new crises. Although Jordan had not signed the 1951 Convention or the 1967 Protocol, it stood ready to continue to provide assistance to refugees, in accordance with the principles embodied in those two instruments. It had never turned away a single asylum-seeker, as UNHCR could confirm. Nevertheless, donors should help developing countries, which were obliged to cope with ecological and demographic problems, strains on their infrastructure and threats to their stability as a result of refugee crises. The Government of Jordan welcomed the cooperation it had received from UNHCR in connection with Palestinian refugees. In that regard, he recalled that 1.5 million Palestinian refugees had passed through Jordan and that the effects of that crisis were still being felt. Lastly, he drew attention to the suffering of the Palestinian people as a result of Israel's violence, which the Executive Committee should condemn.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.